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ABSTRACT

The Goal Center Plan at Donnelly College, Kansas City, which is designed to provide high-risk students, usually adults, with the basic skills, study habits, and attitudes to succeed in regular courses, is described. Based on placement tests, high-risk students are encouraged to take the following three-credit courses: essentials of English, reading/study skills, essentials of mathematics, and individual differences (behavioral science). The psychology class is directed to improving students' self-image through greater self-perception. Salaried peer tutors were made available for students in the program, which is voluntary. This plan prevents students from enrolling in classes too difficult for them and provides more hope for success and retention. The program involves the four classes for five days a week for a semester. The program is presented as a special policy of a special college, and an attempt is made to accentuate the positive benefits of the approach. The college has an open door policy and its mission is to provide postsecondary education for those who might not otherwise have an opportunity. The core program was evaluated in terms of student grades and retention. Eight of the 12 initial students in the program returned for their second semester. (SW)

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THE GOAL CENTER AT DONNELLY COLLEGE

Donnelly College is a private community junior college in the innercity of Kansas City, Kansas. Its published mission is "to provide education at the postsecondary and associate degree level with particular concern for those who might not otherwise have an opportunity."

A federal grant for Special Services for Disadvantaged Students has been in place since the fall of 1978. From September 1978 to August 1980 there were 274 students served, of which 71% were Black, the average age being 25 years. The school's enrollment averages about 800-850 students a semester.

The Goal Center in Special Services evolved from discussions among instructors of high-risk students whose drop-out and failure rates were discouraging. Many times these students were "lost in the shuffle" and did not receive the attention they needed on time. A case of too little too late. Permission was requested and obtained to establish a schedule for a CORE GROUP of SSDS students who would spend their initial semester in college in concentrated basic study. The office and tutoring area for Special Services was named the Goal Center, a term hopefully implying short- and long-term plans and the means to realize them.

CONCERNS

1. Donnelly's open door policy brought many students who lacked basic skills: reading, writing, math, etc.
2. These students could not function in regular college courses.
3. The traditional system did not seem to give the majority of high-risk students sufficient background for regular classes.

   Even students in Essentials of English (basic) were concurrently enrolled in regular college courses, thereby increasing the risk of failure because they could not handle the reading and writing necessary.

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b. Because of their meager educational background, these students
   1) lacked the concept of what real education is
   2) lacked the proper motivation to achieve proficiency in basic skills (shown by the few numbers who came to Special Services on their own -- or even with instructors' encouragement),
   3) lacked the techniques and self-discipline for real and productive study.

RATIONALE

"The goal of Special Services is to increase retention and graduation rates of students from low-income families who have academic potential but who may lack adequate secondary school preparation." With that given, the implication was that the students involved would be required to take the regular college courses with students with adequate background. The high-risk students needed more than band aid help in order to achieve at an even minimal level. They needed intense and sustained concentration in the basic skills to overcome past educational problems so they could successfully take regular college courses. When they did enroll in regular courses (psychology, composition, history, etc.), one of three possible moves was almost always necessary:

1. water down the subject matter to fit their needs (unjust to them and the other students)
2. "pass them on" (that is what happened to them in the past)
3. or subject them to inevitable failure

The plan of the Goal Center did not depart from the mission of Donnelly. On the contrary, it emphasized more strongly what Donnelly is about: to provide education....with particular concern for those who might not otherwise have an opportunity. These students should have the opportunity to work toward graduation, not merely matriculate.

THE GOAL CENTER PLAN

New students took placement tests in English and mathematics. Those not proficient enough in the skills to enroll in regular college classes were encouraged to take the following four courses:

Essentials of English (writing, grammar, etc.)	5 days a week, 3 cr. hrs.
Reading/Study Skills	5 days a week, 3 cr. hrs.

Essentials of Mathematics	4 days a week, 3 cr. hrs.
Individual Differences (behavioral science)	5 days a week 3 cr. hrs.

The purpose of the psychology class was to improve the students' self-image through greater self-perception. Many high-risk students have a defeatist attitude because of past failures in the academic area. This course included work on self-appraisal, realistic goal setting, motivation, and problem solving.

The above are 12 hours of electives toward a Donnelly degree.

These classes ideally were taught by instructors who

1. were an integral part of this program,
2. were people who would drill daily on essentials,
3. were able to teach these courses with positive attitudes, and
4. were also teaching in the regular stream of courses. This factor would give more "college presence" to these students.

Salaried peer tutors were made available for students who needed and/or wanted extra help.

The goal of the above semester plan was to bring the high-risk students to a place where they had the tools, the study habits and the attitude to succeed in the regular courses.

Students enrolled in the Core Program on a purely voluntary basis. Before registration, in an interview with the Director of the Center, the student was given an explanation of the program -- its purposes and advantages. The student was free to enroll in the program or to choose the traditional classes.

ADVANTAGES

This plan

1. prevented students from enrolling in classes too difficult for them because they did not have the tools with which to work. They needed to avoid more failure than what they had already experienced in the past;
2. provided an actual department or CORE through which high-risk students moved, giving
   a. the Special Services staff more access to these students
   b. esprit de corps among these students since they saw that they were in a program that assured them more possibility of success than if they were adrift in the general stream;

3. provided the students with realistic, immediately reachable goals;

4. provided more hope for future success;

5. increased chances of higher retention rate and ultimate graduation;

6. provided even for those who must drop out or stop out a better experience and body of knowledge than if they had spent an unsuccessful semester in regular classes.

The high intensity of four classes for five days a week for a semester provided a closer bond between instructor and student, an early awareness of potential problems, and a practice for more stability in attendance and preparation than the high-risk student had experienced in the past.

To be effective, the Goal Center and its program had to be presented as a special policy of a special college -- Donnelly: that we prepare students to earn degrees, starting from the position of the student when he comes to the school.

The whole approach had to be on a positive note. It is accepted that people must learn to walk before they can run, and this program would be the first step in teaching high-risk students what it takes to succeed in college. Spending an initial extra semester was worth avoiding the very real danger of failing one more time.

When the program is handled with a positive and enthusiastic attitude among administration and faculty, there is no stigma attached to attending these classes. (There is no stigma to being in the beginning swim class if one cannot swim. The life one saves could be one's own.) Many times in the initial interview the student would say, "That is just what I am looking for. I need to start from the beginning because I'm not sure I can make it."

Many people feel keenly the lack of preparation for college, and with the amount of publicity given to the poor state of secondary education in general, no one needs to assume full guilt or shoulder all the blame. But one must be honest with the students: if they cannot handle college courses during their first semester, they and their instructors need to face that fact. But one must also assure them that they can be helped to succeed in college with better than D grades.

The following is a followup on the initial class in the Goal Center. Twelve students were accepted for that first trial. Of those, all needed remedial work in English, reading, and mathematics. Three had GED certificates, two did not have GPA's from high school since they were in courses that were not graded, and the others had GPA's of 1.0. The <u>final grades</u> for the initial semester were as follows:

ENGLISH		READING/STUDY SKILLS		PSYCHOLOGY	
A	0 students	A	2 students	A	3 students
B	4 "	B	6 "	B	3 "
C	4 "	C	2 "	C	2 "
D	0 "	D	1 "	D	2 "
F	2 "	F	1 "	F	2 "
W	2 "	W	0 "	W	0 "

Because of the modular system in mathematics, no comparative grades are available. About half of the students completed two mods.

Eight of the above students returned for their second semester. Retention rate for students in regular remedial classes is less than 50% as opposed to the 66 2/3% of the Goal Center students. (In an Essentials of English course the previous semester, one half of the students were withdrawn before the end of the semester.) Of the eight returning students from the initial Goal Center program, six were enrolled in Composition I, four earning B grades and two earning C grades. Of the four who did not return, one moved out of town, one transferred to another college, one had medical problems and the fourth could not be located.

The current GPA of the returning students is 2.53 (range from 1.6 to 3.5) with a total of 172 credit hours.

In a school that proclaims to be student-centered, the policy must be to start with where the student is and educate from that point. Especially in these days of the nontraditional students, plans must be flexible enough to accommodate a broad range of abilities, needs, and aspirations.